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EXCUSES FOR NEGLECTING

THE

LORD'S SUPPER

ANSWERED.

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EXCUSES
FOR
NEGLECTING THE LORD'S SUPPER
ANSWERED.

ST. LUKE xiv. 18.

"I pray thee have me EXCUSED."

THERE is no subject, however plainly laid down in scripture, that has entirely escaped the misinterpretation of man. We have, on the one hand, the mystical enthusiast, to elevate and spiritualize every simple direction of practice; we have, on the other hand, the literal interpreter of the word of God, to level and bring down to his own practical capacity, the spiritual mysteries of the Most High. What wonder, then, at in the sacrament of the Eucharist, various objections, endless errors in opinion, as to its utility, its necessity, the frequency of its reception, the degree of fitness requisite, and the sin of receiving it in an unworthy manner, should abound in the hearts as well as in the mouths of men. To these erroneous opinions, by which so many of good intention, and, generally

speaking, sincere lovers of the word of God, are deterred from presenting themselves at the altar; and through which so many holding them forth upon pretence and worldliness of motive, are glad to escape the solemn obligations of their religion,—we will now, with God's blessing, direct our attention.

I. The first and most conspicuous in the list, as well as the most prevalent in every rank of life, is this,—*the idea of absolute perfection being necessary in him who communicates.* This is so well put, in the words of a most pious Christian, as well as one of our best and most learned writers, Samuel Johnson, that I cannot do better than give it in his words:—

“Such exalted piety, such unshaken virtue, such an uniform ardour of divine affections, and such a constant practice of religious duties, have been represented as so indispensably necessary to a worthy reception of this sacrament, as few men have been able to discover in those whom they most esteem for their purity of life; and which no man's conscience will perhaps suffer him to find in himself; and therefore those who know themselves not to have arrived at such elevated excellence, who struggle with passions which they cannot wholly conquer, and bewail infirmities which they yet perceive to adhere to them, are frightened from an act of devotion of which they have been taught to believe that it is so scarcely to be performed worthily by an embodied spirit, that it requires the holiness of angels, and the uncontaminated raptures of paradise¹.” Now it stands, upon the first view of the question, against common sense, that any service should be demanded of man, of which the requisite should be unattainable perfection; and it stands against all assertions of scripture, that any sin committed against God, (one only excepted, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,) should, without hope of recovery, incur condemnation; of these two propositions we may be perfectly certain, from

¹ Johnson's Sermons, Sermon. xxii.

the acknowledged attributes of Almighty God, from his justice, mercy, love of mankind, and above all, the sacrifice which he made for human redemption. If God were to require a service in which all the sinfulness of the human heart should be expected to be set aside, and yet know, as of course he must, that that sinfulness was so part and parcel of our nature as to be unavoidably inherent in every human being, his attribute of justice would be questionable. If he were to inflict punishment, without hope of pardon, upon every attempt at obedience, because that attempt, though sincere, could not be successful, his attribute of mercy would be questionable. If he were to exact the performance of a ceremony typical of his extraordinary love of mankind, so extraordinary as to involve the death of God himself incarnate, and yet should punish, when his creatures approached in humble endeavour to fulfil his directions, his attribute of love would be questionable: the sacrifice which Jesus made upon the cross would be more than questionable—*useless*: and the command that he gives in scripture to record that sacrifice, worse than a mockery, because it would be a mere aggravation of the wretchedness of man, which it professed to comfort, and an extension of his condemnation, which it professed to redeem. Hence, then, from our first and barest conception of what God is, that he should demand a state of sinless perfection in the performance of any duty, would be contrary to our expectation.

In our other dealings with Him, we never dream of perfection; on the contrary, the whole sum of our communication with him arises from our *imperfection*. It is because we are imperfect that we approach him in prayer. It is because we are sinful that we are baptized. It is because we are frail, weak, and impotent in the control and regulation of our passions, that we approach him in confession. It is because we are under a sense of his wrath, and the burden of our natural and daily sins, that we require and receive

from the hands of his ministers the promise of absolution, that we hear continually repeated in his holy scriptures the assurance of pardon, the help of the Spirit to prevent, to strengthen, and to guide. Extend the same feeling to that more solemn communication with him in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and you will see the same form for its acknowledgment, and the same vent for the holy aspirations of a sinful, yet contrite heart. In that sacrament there is the express *confession* of sinfulness. There is the promise of *absolution*. There is the *prayer* for help;—but wherefore all these, if the communicant is to be perfect? Nay, wherefore the sacrament at all? Wherefore that of which it is the representative and recorder, the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God—but because of *sin*, not because of perfection? Wherefore do we need the memorial, in any shape, but that we are sinners, but that we grievously offend God night and day, but that we confess and allow, by our very presence at the altar, our utter and never-ceasing need of an atonement for that imperfection, some other to bear the burden of our sins, which would otherwise be intolerable; some other by whose stripes we are healed, and upon whom our chastisements have been laid¹.

¹ We are indeed told to "be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect," Matt. v. 48: and St. Peter tells us: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, By ye holy, for I am holy," 1 Peter i. 15, 16. And it is unquestionably the duty of every Christian to *strive* to attain this perfection—to *strive* to possess this holiness. As we struggle onwards through the difficulties of life, we may be nearer and nearer, but we shall never approach it *quite*. We may set down such and such points of excellence, as constituting perfection, but when we have attained those points, there are others beyond them which we never saw before; and the better we are, in comparison with other men, the worse we shall feel ourselves to be; even as the more we know, the more ignorant we find ourselves; for knowledge only teaches us how little we really know, and moral virtue only shews us (when directed by the gospel of Jesus Christ) how sinful we are. If we say that we are perfect, we say that we have no sin: but, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Now, if you look to the form of service by which the Eucharist is celebrated, will you find there any intimation that perfection is demanded on the part of the communicant? We have minutely examined this service already¹, and we must have seen that the whole tenor of the ritual is on the supposition of the most abject frailty, the daily liability to fall from righteousness, the necessity of renewed strength, to be sought at the hands of God, just because of continual weakness on the part of man.

In one of the prayers used in the service of the Eucharist, we find the following expressions: "We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness." Again: "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table." Again, in another of the prayers: "Although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice." Yet, notwithstanding all this confession and acknowledgment of imperfection—when the sacred elements have been received—we kneel down before God, and say, "We most heartily thank thee for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us who have duly received these holy mysteries." So that being *unworthy* to receive them, is not incompatible with receiving them *duly*. If we should wait till we are *worthy* to receive them, we should never receive them at all. If we should think ourselves, or call ourselves *worthy* to receive them, that instant we should, in fact, be *unworthy*—because then, pride, self-satisfaction, and a host of sins, which exclude the doctrines of the sacrament, would take possession of our hearts, and Jesus Christ would be forgotten.

II. The second objection to which we may allude, arises from a misinterpretation of certain texts of scripture.

The timid, though sincere Christian, desirous to

¹ See chap. v.

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please, yet afraid to offend, finds the word of God apparently arrayed against him. In the first place, he finds in the exhortation which is read by the minister, when warning is given of the celebration of the Eucharist on the Sunday or holiday preceding, the following assertion: "Lest, after the taking of that holy sacrament the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of soul and body." Now, the passage here referred to must be either Luke xxii. 8, or John xiii. 26. In the former of these passages, though Satan is described as entering into Judas, yet it is evidently antecedent altogether to the passover, and, therefore, to the institution of the Eucharist: in the latter, where St. John asks our Lord who it is that should betray him, it is certainly said, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it; and when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot; and after the sop, Satan entered into him." But here also the giving of the sop was in the commencement of the passover, and preceding the institution of the Lord's Supper; and therefore can involve in no way the conclusion, that Satan entered into the heart of Judas, because he had received the sacrament of the Eucharist at the hands of our Lord, being a sinner. Whether Judas did partake, with the eleven other apostles, of the bread and wine, is a very great question. There is nothing to shew that he did: on the contrary, we may very well suppose, that after the delivery of the sop, he went out for the purpose of betraying Jesus to the chief priests, and was not present at the institution at all. But even if he were, what then? Satan had evidently entered into him *previously*, as mentioned by St. Luke. The intention to betray his divine Master had for some time existed in his breast; and, therefore, he must have received the bread and wine (if he did receive it) with the intention already formed, with malice, treachery, and avarice rankling in his heart, thus adding hypocrisy

and fraud to the other vices of his character. The partaking of the sop, or the eating and drinking of the bread and wine, were not the causes of Satan entering into him. Satan was there already; and therefore, referring to the passages above-quoted in the exhortation, it is quite a mistaken view of the question to fear lest any power over our souls should be permitted to Satan; far the contrary; if Satan be in our souls already, if we are of the world, full of carnal lusts and evil affections, how can we hope to expel them, unless by the grace of God? and how shall we obtain the grace of God, unless we use the means? and one of the means is the Eucharist. Rather ought we to consider the other exhortation, which tells us plainly, upon the authority of God's word; "Take ye good heed, lest ye, withdrawing yourselves from this holy supper, provoke God's indignation against you."

But there is another passage of scripture, still more a stumbling-block than the one just discussed. It is the well known place in the first epistle to the Corinthians: "Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord *unworthily*, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." Which very words he finds incorporated in our liturgy, and made a part of the warning which is pronounced by the minister at the time of communion. The words are: "So is the danger great if we receive the same unworthily. For then we are guilty of the body and blood of Christ, our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation; not considering the Lord's body, we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death." This, indeed, it must be confessed, is, in the highest degree, a serious admonition. It effectually excludes all levity, all purposed slight, all hypocrisy in our attendance at the altar, but I am sure that the words do not apply any further.

To elucidate this, we must proceed according to the

only rule for examining a difficulty; we must interpret scripture by scripture. One solitary text standing by itself, unless we know the context, unless we know what has preceded, and the course of the argument, and the circumstances of the argument, is of no authority whatever: and if we look to this passage with this view, all objection will quickly disappear.

In primitive times, and by the custom of the apostles, there was attached to the celebration of the sacrament another feast or banquet, called the Agape, or Feast of Charity, or Love-Feast. It is much disputed whether this agape, or love-feast, was celebrated *before* or *after* the actual celebration of the sacrament; but it matters not to the question before us. The origin of it was this:—The donations and offerings of the people being much more than was absolutely required for the sacrament, and being made in kind, that is, in bread, wine, grapes, and the like; at the conclusion of the sacrament, when they had set apart that portion which was required for the clergy, of the remainder they made a common meal in the church; and as it was the rich who thus contributed to feed the poor, it took the name of Agape¹. Most likely, therefore, as we know that the ancient custom was to celebrate the Eucharist fasting, early in the morning, the donations of the rich would be reserved for some later portion of the day, when the poorer communicants might again assemble in the church; and this would accord with Pliny's account, who says that the Chris-

¹ St. Chrysostom describing the Agape, speaks thus: "The first Christians had all things in common, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, and when that ceased, as it did in the apostles' time, this came in its room. For though the rich did not make their substance common, yet upon certain days they made a common table, and when their service was ended, and they had all communicated in the holy mysteries, they all met at a common feast, the rich bringing provisions, and the poor, and those who had nothing, being invited, they all feasted in common together."—Chrys. Hom. in 1 Cor. And it appears, from various other passages, that not only was it customary to join the Agape to the Eucharist, but the Eucharist was never celebrated without the Agape."—See Bingham, book xv.

tians, binding themselves by a sacrament, would afterwards meet at a common meal, in which was nothing criminal. However, be this as it may, whether after or before, there undoubtedly was some feast or banquet, at which the rich, making contributions for the poor, would join them, in charity and love, as equally in need of the blessings of God, and equal inheritors of his kingdom. As long as this banquet was observed with quiet thankfulness and due propriety of conduct, of course there could be no objection to it; and connected as it was with the actual Eucharist, it was a means of diffusing that Christian brotherly feeling which the gospel so constantly inculcates. But the Corinthians had perverted its original use as a religious feast, into a common and ordinary meal, had assembled together in the church to eat and drink, having no regard whatever to Christ's institution, nor considering it in any way as the memorial of his death.

At this feast, so celebrated, there had been many instances of actual drunkenness, and various other excesses. Therefore the apostle, in writing to the Corinthians with the express purpose of correcting many erroneous opinions and practices which had crept into their church, among others, alludes to this. He says, "When ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper; and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What! have ye not houses to eat and drink in? or despise ye the church of God?" And then, after describing the manner in which Jesus instituted the Eucharist, in order to give them a clearer conception of what it really was, he concludes with the text in question: "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." Now it is evident that this bears reference, not to the generality of mankind, but to the

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 20—22.

Corinthians only ; that the sort of unworthiness here described, is that perversion of the holy sacrament, of which they had specifically been guilty. It is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should repent and be saved. "It is not by one act of wickedness that infinite mercy will be kindled to everlasting anger, and the beneficent Father of the Universe for ever alienated from his creatures, but by a long course of crime, deliberately committed, against the convictions of conscience, and the admonitions of grace ; by a life spent in guilt, and concluded without repentance. 'No drunkard, or extortioner,' says the apostle, 'shall inherit eternal life.' Yet shall no man be excluded from future happiness by a single instance, or even by long habits of intemperance, or extortion, because repentance and a new life may efface his crimes¹." And the crime of unworthily receiving the Lord's Supper is not different from other crimes. Supposing that a man *should* come to the Lord's Supper unworthily. Supposing that he should be guilty, a case extremely improbable, yet supposing it for a moment, that he should be guilty of the sin of partaking unworthily of the Lord's Supper, is there any thing in scripture to shew (sin though it be) that it is unpardonable? Though the soul is by such an act of wickedness endangered, it is not necessarily destroyed, or irreversibly condemned. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, contributes indeed, by eating and drinking, to his own damnation, as he that engages in any fraudulent or criminal transaction, contributes in the same way to his own damnation. But he that abstains altogether, is sure to be committing a sin ; and therefore he does not the more ensure himself from danger by abstaining, than by communicating. As no short fervour of piety, nor particular acts of beneficence, however exalted, can secure a man from the possibility of sinking into wickedness, so no neglect of devotion,

¹ Johnson, Serm. xxii.

nor commission of crime, can preclude the means of grace, or the hope of glory, provided those conditions are fulfilled which the gospel demands as necessary to pardon. He that has eaten and drunk unworthily, may still enter into salvation by repentance and amendment, as he that has eaten and drunk worthily, may, by negligence or presumption, perish everlastingly.

But, independently of this, the sin of the Corinthians can hardly, in any case, be applied to us. Our method of celebrating the Lord's Supper precludes the possibility of such a violation of its solemnity. Only let us "*discern the Lord's body*," remember what we are about, distinguish the bread and wine of which we there partake from other bread and wine, impressing upon our minds a just idea of the sacred nature of the rite,—that it is the sacrifice of Christ's death which we thereby commemorate, that it is the body broken upon the cross, and the blood poured forth for human sin, which is represented under the elements of bread and wine,—and with this discerning it is impossible that we then should fall into the sin of the Corinthians¹.

III. The third erroneous opinion in regard to the Eucharist may be thus expressed: "It was an institution adapted for apostolic times. Christ's command was only to his immediate followers, and I do not

¹ The reader should also notice, as strengthening the arguments above urged, that the word used by the apostle is *unworthily*, not *unworthy*. In no case can we be worthy to have communion in the blood of Jesus, but we all may avoid the sin of communicating in an unworthy manner. I am borne out in this view of the subject by bishop Beveridge, who thus speaks of the passage in question: "He doth not say, 'he that being unworthy, (for so all men are,) but he that doeth it unworthily, in an unworthy, irreverent, or indecent manner, not becoming so holy an institution, shall receive damnation, (or rather, as the word signifies,) judgment against himself.' And then, to shew what *kind* of unworthy receiving he here means, he adds, '*not discerning the Lord's body*;' that is, making no difference between that and common food, but eating the bread, and drinking the cup, after the same manner as they do their ordinary drink."—Beveridge's Church Catechism explained.

consider that the obligation extends in any way to the present day." Now this is immediately refuted on two convincing grounds; first, common sense; secondly, scripture. The apostles, personally, had no such particular necessity for an institution to remember Christ's death. Would it be possible that a follower of Jesus Christ, within one generation after that dreadful death which was encountered on the cross for the sake of man, should forget that death; would the words of heavenly warning, the prophetic admonition, "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him, and the third day he shall rise again,"—would these words, and others of similar import, so solemnly delivered, and so shortly after fulfilled in the dying scene of Calvary, be likely to be forgotten? Would the scourging of the officer, the spitting of the profane Jew, the mocking of the Scribes and Pharisees, the gall mingled with myrrh, the vinegar, the hyssop, the dying words, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," and the last out-pouring of the spirit, "It is finished;"—these very circumstances all prophetically announced hundreds of years before, and now fulfilled in their very presence; the sacrifice for sin wrought and perfected, the redemption of man achieved, the salvation of the faithful secured;—would, I say, these great and glorious things, great and glorious past all expression, need a memorial in the hearts of them who were present, and were eye-witnesses of the things that were done, and who were gifted by the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost to bear testimony of them to others? Surely no. But when year after year should roll away, and when the memory of a dying Saviour should grow faint as a tradition, should be lost and perverted in the handing down from father to son, then would this holy Eucharist, on the same principle as the memory of the

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Jewish exode in the passover, be retained as a sure token of the truth of our incarnate God, as a sure remembrance of him who ransomed the world from a worse bondage than that of the Israelites, and wrought a far more glorious exode than that from Egypt. The memorial would be "for us and for our children for ever," not for the apostles, but it must *begin* with the apostles, otherwise it could never be handed down securely to us; the first step in the transmission must be the most sure, in order that all the subsequent ones might rest upon unquestionable authority.

But, further, what saith the scripture on this head? St. Paul declares the institution of the sacrament, first, generally. He declares it is of immediate and special revelation to himself. He says: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner, also, he took the cup, when he had supped, saying: This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Here, indeed, is a general annunciation, differing in no material manner from the words of the evangelists: but then he adds these remarkable words: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come:" marking out most distinctly, as distinctly as human words can make out any thing, that this memorial is to continue through all ages, and all time, until that day when the Lord shall come to judge the world in righteousness: and thus it is that we, to whom eighteen hundred years have passed since the death of our Redeemer, do now shew forth his death, and we must continue to shew forth his death, we and our children afterwards, "until he come;" until, whether, as quick, we shall go forth to meet him in the air, or, as dead, shall

stand before the seat of judgment, to await the recompence of our deeds done in the flesh.

Let Christians, therefore, remember, dwell upon this remarkable fact—that through all the circumstances of the church, through persecutions, through fire and sword, through famine and death, as well also in prosperity, and earthly glory, and earthly dominion, this memorial has as yet continued: however it may have been perverted in one age; however it may have lost its original simplicity in another age; however the majority of mankind have, by their negligence or their wilfulness, omitted its performance in all ages; still has there ever been a faithful few to shew forth Christ's death.

We have often had occasion to censure the Roman Catholic custom of solitary masses, but this good may be allowed to belong to them—that they did, *in some way*, keep alive that remembrance which the rest of the world passed by. Though in the heap of rubbish that was thrown up indiscriminately on all hands, the true fire of religion was obscured, still the spark, the vital spark, continued alive, which afterwards penetrated through all difficulties, and burst forth into a flame, which kindled full brightly. How know we but that the origin of solitary masses may be attributed to the defection of the bulk of the laity to remember Christ's death, and not to the wilful perversion of the priests? that year after year fewer and fewer were found to communicate, and so the clergy were *compelled* to communicate by themselves? And how know we but that this may be the case again? that if every Christian says: "It is no business of *mine* more than others; there are plenty of communicants to be found without *me*:" how know we but that the time may come again when the altar of Jesus may be prepared, and the banquet made ready, and the minister standing at his post, and yet no one be found to hear the ministration, or to record the sacrifice? **O let us not be the first to fail now. Let us not, who**

boast to be of the children of the day, enlightened, and instructed, in the nineteenth century of Christ's church, be the first to put a stop, or even make any let or hindrance, to the transmission of the memory of Christ's sacrifice; but let every one of us, every one, with no single or accidental exception whatever, but every one reach forth his hand to transmit it to our children, and our children's children, for ever. Each individual is equally concerned, each individual is to his own family, his own domestic circle, his own children, the point on which this memorial depends. Let him fail not to contribute to "shew forth the Lord's death till he come."

IV. Let us now proceed to another erroneous opinion. Many think that after the sacrament has been received, every sin committed is unpardoned; that if we should, by any temptations of the flesh, relapse into an accidental deviation from God's word, or an habitual course of sinfulness, no forgiveness can ever be obtained again. This may be entirely refuted, even as in the first case, by a reference to the attributes of God; his mercy, his justice, and his love. God, by his Son Jesus Christ, has commanded us to eat the outward symbols of bread and wine in token of his sacrifice. By this sacrifice, upon repentance for the past, and faith for the future, and upon a sincere intention to lead a new life, we hope that our past sins may be forgiven, and we are assured that they are; but there is nothing implied as a preventive against subsequent lapses. It is impossible but that we should sin repeatedly after its reception, and yet we may come to the holy table as repeatedly, and every one of us does so. We believe, indeed, that by presenting ourselves constantly and regularly at the table of the Lord we may gradually improve, we may gradually grow more confirmed in our resistance against the temptations of our nature; and as we use the means of grace which God has vouchsafed, so we trust that we shall have stronger hopes of glory; and

though we know that we never, in this imperfect state of things, can be sinless, yet we may strive to "grow in grace," we may be fed with the sincere milk of the word, as *babes*, at first, in order that we may be able to partake of the strong meat of *grown-up men* afterwards; and so struggle, not as one that beateth the air, but as one contending for the mastery in a most arduous conflict, but for a most glorious prize, "the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus." This is one of the great ends of the sacrament, and one of the reasons of its needed repetition.

But there is a passage occurring in St Matthew, which troubles such persons much: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and finding none: then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out, and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; *and the last state of that man is worse than the first*¹." So they argue, when once I have made up my mind to receive the holy sacrament,—when once I have systematically planned an amendment of life, and earnestly looked upon the past in repentance,—when having thus cleansed the house, I shall have received the sacrament,—and afterwards, my house being left empty, swept, and garnished, I should relapse—why here I am expressly told that I am worse than I was before. Most undoubtedly you would be worse than you were before. The more knowledge you have of your sinfulness, and yet sin in spite of that knowledge, the more guilty you are. But does the mere act of receiving the sacrament, the *opus operatum*, create that knowledge? Does not the knowledge precede the act; and is it not the very knowledge, the very feeling you have of sin and wretchedness, that leads you to

¹ Matt. xii. 43.

think of the act? Most unquestionably. The process of the mind is this: I see a command of him whom I acknowledge my Saviour. I feel a sense of sinfulness and regret for past delinquencies. I wish to profit by that command. By that very sense, call it conscience, the working of the Holy Spirit, or what you may, your heart is as it were cleansed, and the evil spirit is gone. The reception of the sacrament will not do more than confirm that sense, and make sure that cleansing. Under this state of things, if you *refuse* to receive the sacrament, you are not the more likely to be guiltless in case of future relapse. On the contrary, you will be tenfold more guilty; because, seeing a means of help, you have rejected it; knowing the grace of God, you have done despite to it: while all the while your evil spirit is hovering at the door, ready to come back at the first opportunity; and that opportunity will surely be more ready to his hand, because you have rejected the admonition of the Lord.

When once convinced of sin, then is the moment in which you are in the case of the unclean spirit gone out; and the only difference which would arise from your reception of the sacrament would be, that in all probability your house would then be well defended, it would never *be* empty, swept, and garnished, the seven evil spirits would retire defeated and abashed, and you yourself would go on from strength to strength, the righteous servant of the Lord.

But let us not err on the other side of the question. Do not suppose that you may come to the altar with any intention, any secret reservation, to continue in your sins. God forbid. Unless you come with a stedfast determination, as far as in you lies, to relinquish all that is past; unless you look to the future with an earnest hope for improvement; unless you pray for the Spirit to help your determination, and to work in your heart a new creature; at each several time you communicate, you will be but playing the hypocrite with God: you will be but using his means

of grace to his dishonour; you will be but the whited sepulchre, full of dead men's bones; you will literally be like Judas, who went and sat down at the same table with his Lord, *intending* all the while to betray him: and of course, if you go to the table of the Lord, *intending* to betray him, intending to persevere in your sins, you must expect that, like Judas, Satan¹ will enter into you, and dwell there. But the fact of your involuntary failing, your falling into sin inadvertently, is a totally distinct matter. If your heart is right with God at the time of communicating, all will be well. There is not a man alive—there never could be a man who has received the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and has lived a day, nay, even an hour after its reception—but that has stood in need of fresh mediation on the part of Jesus, even for that hour. It is the constancy of our sins that renders the constancy of our communicating vitally necessary. It is because we are weak, that we must ask for a renewal of strength; because we have been soiled by our renewed intercourse with the world, that we have need to come back to the altar for a fresh washing of our souls in the blood of the Lamb of God. It is because carnal things *must*, by our very construction, constitute a considerable portion of our lives, that we betake ourselves to the body and blood of Christ for a fresh enlivening of our souls by things spiritual. It is because our memories are weak, our good emotions transitory, our aspirations after the glory of God faint and imperfect, that we therefore need a fresh notification of the grace of God, fresh confidence in the sacrifice of the cross, fresh hope of ascending on high together with our blessed Lord into the mansions of eternal peace and glory.

V. Another error in our notions of the Lord's

¹ The case of Judas has been already entered into under the second objection, "*difficulties from scripture.*" The supposition above referred to, is the only possible supposition by which the parallel can hold good.

Supper is.—*The deferring its reception to a time of sickness, or to the bed of death.* This in great part arises from the previous one. If sin after the reception of the Lord's Supper be unpardonable, (and we all feel that a liability to sin can never be escaped from), then, of course, it follows, that the later it is received the better; the nearer the extremity of life the less chance of condemnation from God for any omission of duty or commission of crime, that shall arise subsequently. Here indeed is a strange infatuation. An acknowledgement of its necessity, but an indefinite postponement of it,—so indefinite, as from the accidents of life to render its participation extremely contingent. By this rule, multitudes of men would never partake of it at all; because multitudes of men die suddenly, and without any sickness whatever,—multitudes never have a death-bed; die by the sudden attacks of diseases which suffer no time for consideration, in the perils of water, in the perils of shipwreck, in the perils of war,—in short, there are a thousand chances, which every one must know, by which life is taken away without any note of preparation. “In the midst of life we are in death.” Besides—Is not the whole ceremony devised for a time of joy and thanksgiving¹; not for a time of sorrow, or of approaching death?

Consider the expressions: “Therefore, with angels

¹ Here we may observe, that in all strictness, the celebration of the Eucharist on any days but those of joy; such as the Lord's Day, or the commemoration of the saints and martyrs, is not consistent with the meaning of the sacrament. For instance, Good Friday, though by present custom a day universally set apart for the Eucharist, yet being a fast day, a day of deep humiliation and sorrow, is not in all respects suitable. And that our church is of this opinion, and did not mean to authorize the celebration of the sacrament on Good Friday, is evident, from there being no sentence in the Liturgy to mark that day. For all other days—Easter, Ascension, Whit-sunday, and so on, there is an especial sentence, descriptive of the benefits derived from the day; but no notice is taken of Good Friday. In fact, the Eucharist being a *feast*, and Good Friday a *fast*, the two things do not harmonize. But custom has now so long sanctioned it, that it would be difficult, without authority, to omit it.

vigorous, and not give him your service when you are old and decrepit, and fit for nothing else.

You will remember his death, while that remembrance may be shewn by the fruits of holiness of life, and not by a superstitious alarm in the ambiguous expressions of your dying moments. Often and often is the minister of Christ called, in his holy office, to administer the sacrament to the dying. His first question invariably is, "Have you partaken of this holy rite during life?" How almost invariably the answer is in the negative; and if the subject be pursued so as to ascertain the cause of its previous neglect, coupled with the present desire to neglect it no longer, in almost every instance we find the reason such as just now stated. It is thought a charm, a panacea for all sins; a passport for the Christian into the kingdom of God. But there is no command of Christ, that any thing done in the extremities of life shall act as a passport to heaven. It may be received by the dying without any benefit whatever; it may be received ignorantly, or it may be received without faith, and without penitence, and without due self-examination in the natural hurry of such an hour; and then it cannot be effectual; it is only the faithful who can receive it effectually; and the faithful are those who believe in Christ Jesus spiritually, who cannot think that any outward act will tend in any degree either to save or condemn, to remit or to retain, and that know and feel every day of their lives, as well as in the hour of death, that they have need to remember the atonement of their Saviour, and that they cannot afford to lose any one means of grace, by which the mediation between God and themselves shall be carried on through Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

VI. But there is another excuse still more difficult to contend with. *Want of time for a due preparation.* Most surely, a due preparation for so solemn an ordinance is the part of every sincere Christian. We must not come to the table of the Lord with worldly or

carnal minds, with our hearts unrepenting, or uncharitable, or careless. It was precisely for this reason that St. Paul censured the Corinthians, in the passage to which we before alluded. They came without a due impression of the sacred nature of the feast. They did not "discern the Lord's body." And so at the present day, gladly agreeing with the apostle, that it is necessary that they should discern the Lord's body, because they are of the world, and the world cannot discern the Lord's body, therefore they are excused. Is this a good argument? Yet it is an argument under which the worldly man, the man of pleasure, the man of business, shelter themselves at this day. They cry, "I have no time to prepare." They fulfil, to the letter, the parable of the supper described by St. Luke. The invited guests all began to make excuse. The first said, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it, I pray thee have me excused. Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them, I pray thee have me excused; and another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Now, in this parable, each man excuses himself on the ground of other duties to be performed, No one says, "I care not for your invitation; I see not why you should ask me; I do not consider myself bound to give any attention to your hospitality;" but, "I have other things to do; other duties to perform, which are incompatible with this. The ground you will allow must be tilled. The oxen which I have bought you will allow must be proved. The wife whom I have married must be attended to." Now apply this to the Lord's Supper. You say, "I cannot come, because my time is so much occupied in the business of life that I have no time to spare for preparation. I am a servant, and must therefore do my duty to my master. I am a parent, and must therefore provide for my family. I am in a trade or profession which demands so close attention, that I have no opportunity for that meditation and prayer which I consider requisite for this

holy ceremony." But just pursue this argument a little further. You cannot procure time for preparation for an ordinance of Jesus Christ, which you yet acknowledge to be necessary to salvation. Let it be granted, that the world has great claims upon you. Are they so great as the claims which God has upon you? Let it be granted, that there are important duties which demand a considerable share of your attention. Are they *so* important, that God shall be entirely shut out? Is this world so paramount, so all important, so all absorbing, that the next should entirely give way? Is it natural, or is it consistent with the spirit of Christ's teaching, that the soul should be lost, while the body is saved? Do but compare things temporal with things eternal. Do but look at the multitude of exhortations, warnings, parables, which admonish you of this truth; the selling of the whole estate to buy the one field, the goodly pearl, the one thing needful; and then consider whether that attention to the world, that being cumbered about much serving, that buying of oxen, that marrying a wife, can be rationally excusable, or excusable in the sight of God, which sacrifices to the mammon of unrighteousness the praise and memory of Jesus Christ. You are placed by this excuse in a dilemma, from one of whose horns you cannot possibly escape. Either Jesus Christ and the gospel, and your own salvation, must be inferior in your estimation to the world, or else your holding to the world to such an extent as this, is sinful; and the consequence must immediately follow—that you must, however great your possessions may be, forsake all, and follow Jesus Christ.

But, for another reason, the argument is not tenable. It is not tenable on the ground of example. The most laborious in this world's vocation, the most industrious, the most absorbed in the noblest, deepest, and most important of worldly pursuits, are yet constant communicants. We have the most eminent statesmen, the highest judges of the land, the deepest

philosophers, the most industrious tradesmen and merchants, the most laborious physicians; we have examples in abundance of all these various grades of life, which at once belie the excuse that the labours of the world necessarily preclude attention to this holy sacrament. Better were it for you that a millstone were hanged round your neck, and you yourself thrown into the midst of the sea, than that such labour should be used, such wealth heaped up, such honours accumulated, as to preclude the salvation of the soul. Better that the body should be clothed in rags of poverty, that you should walk among the lowliest and most humble servants of the Lord, than that your soul should be dead to the memory of Jesus Christ, if that were the condition of your tenure of riches, of your ambition, of your nobility; and be assured, that if you have no time for preparation for the holy Eucharist *now*, you will have no time for religion, in any shape, *by and by*; you will have no time eventually for going to church, for prayer, either public or private, no time for communing with your heart and being still, no time for reading of the scriptures, no time for studying those holy things which concern the doctrines of salvation. You must come to this in the end. Therefore, let the Christian avoid this excuse above all others, lest, while he first harden his own heart by being overcharged with surfeiting and cares of this life, God himself shall eventually harden it, even as he did the heart of Pharaoh, and cut him off irrevocably from the gifts of his mercy and his grace. "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

VII. We now come to the last consideration on which any erroneous opinion can be formed, and that is, the frequency with which the holy table should be attended.

All other points being settled, all thoughts of unworthiness, all fears, and scruples, and desire to defer it to the hours of sickness and of death, being set

aside, yet there remains the question: "How often? what number of times in the year shall I communicate?" and too frequently the lax and lukewarm Christian contents himself with as few possible times as the nature of the thing seems to admit. At Christmas, or at Easter, two or three times a year, is the sum total of the obligation.

We have already seen that in primitive times a *daily* communion was considered necessary, that shortly after a *weekly* communion. In times of persecution, the sacrament was never omitted by the faithful. It was considered the *viaticum*, the subsistence of the Christian for his journey to heaven, which, in times of *pain*, he expected from day to day to be called upon to make. Cyprian says: "We daily receive the Eucharist¹." In the time of Epiphanius, it declined to three days in the week—Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. The council of Trullo decreed, that they who passed three Sundays without the Eucharist should be excommunicated, and thus gradually decreasing, the council of Agatha deemed that it was necessary to be received three times in the year—Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide; and then Innocent III. gave a further indulgence, that once a year was sufficient. Our own church, while it distinctly recognizes a weekly communion, we may almost say a daily communion, for the *clergy*, yet allows three times a year as all that is compulsory for the *laity*. One of the rubrics, at the end of the communion service, speaks thus: "And in cathedral and collegiate churches, and colleges, where there are many priests and deacons, they shall all receive the communion with the priest *every Sunday* AT THE LEAST, except

¹ So also St. Augustin says: "To receive the sacrament every day I neither praise nor reprove, but at least let them receive it every Lord's day." And St. Ambrose, more pointedly: "Receive every day that which may profit thee every day: but he that is not disposed to receive it every day, is not fit to receive it every year."—De Sac. lib. v. c. 4.

they have a reasonable cause to the contrary." Now the expression *at the least*, would almost imply the daily communion, but every Sunday is, at any rate, distinctly commanded. Another rubric says: "And note that every parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one."

But shall Christians, Protestant Christians, who read and hear the word of God, confine themselves to cold and compulsory rules, and canons, and rubrics? Surely no. God's benefits to us are not measured by the plummet and the line; Jesus Christ shed his life-blood for our redemption; there was no sparing, and measuring, and calculating how *little* he could do for our service. Then why should we measure and calculate how *unfrequently* we may go to his holy table, instead of saying at once, I will be always there; whenever the table is spread, I will be a guest? For the sustenance of our bodies, do we not require daily food? Do we not require the waste which is daily going on by the workings of nature, to be incessantly repaired by bodily nourishment? And shall we take less care of our souls? Shall they be left to perish—shall the sins, ignorances, and negligences which are daily wasting our souls, not require as continual reparation by that spiritual food, which Jesus Christ brought into the world?

But some will say that they do not approve too frequently to communicate, lest by making the ordinance too common, its impression should be lost. But the same argument will apply to prayer, to the observance of divine worship, to every thing appertaining to religion; and surely it is but a poor argument to say that a deficiency in any duty is a means of promoting its more perfect observance. But hear what our great divines say on this subject.

Bishop Beveridge speaks of weekly communion thus:—"Once a week is now thought too much. And I do not deny, but that they who can live a

whole week together without sin, may not have so much need of receiving it so often. But where shall we find such a man? Not among us, be sure. We all know that we sin in thought, word, or deed, every day in the week, if not every hour too¹." Jeremy Taylor speaks thus: "Some religious persons have moved a question, whether it be better to communicate often or seldom; some thinking it more reverence to those holy mysteries to come but seldom, while others say it is greater religion to come frequently. But I suppose this question does not differ much from a dispute, whether it is better to pray often or to pray seldom; for whatsoever is pretended against a frequent communion, may, in its proportion, object against a solemn prayer²." Again, he says, "It hath fared with this sacrament as with other actions of religion which have descended from flames to still fires, from fires to sparks, from sparks to embers, from embers to smoke, from smoke to nothing. And though the public declension of piety is such, that in this present conjuncture of things it is impossible that men should be reduced to a daily communion, yet that they are to communicate frequently is so a duty, that as no excuse but impossibility can make the omission innocent, so the loss and consequent want is infinite and invaluable." But the question is, what is frequently. How many times in the course of the year will constitute the term frequently; what rule should be laid down to regulate our attendance? The church has already laid down a rule, if we must needs have a rule; but the warm and devotional feelings of the true Christian will go far beyond this, which was given rather as the extreme of necessary attendance, than any suggestion as to propriety. Unless very urgent reasons prevail to the contrary, the Christian *ought NEVER to turn his back upon the holy table*. It is not a question whether three

¹ Beveridge. Necessity and advantage of frequent communion.

² Taylor's Life of Christ, sect. xv. disc. xix.

or four times, ten or twenty times, be sufficient. Can we do sufficient to please God? Can we do sufficient in *any* religious duty to please God? The same rule that St. Paul gives for prayer, the Christian should take to himself for the Eucharist: "Be instant" in the Eucharist. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ "without ceasing." The oftener you present yourself at the altar, the more you will desire to come again; the oftener you hold communion with the body and blood of Christ, the less frequently will you hold communion with the world, and the things of the world; and therefore let your rule be this:—Whenever I behold the holy table prepared, whenever I hear the joyful invitation given, "Come, for all things are ready," I will straightway go in search for my wedding garment, I will take my place at the feast, I will be found kneeling at the steps of the altar, hungry for the bread of life, and thirsty for the well of living water.

Thus have I attempted to examine the principal objections and excuses which men outwardly urge to a constant communion in the supper of the Lord. I humbly hope that the errors in all these objections have been demonstrated according to the word of God. But the human mind is prolific beyond measure in contending against the Spirit. Various and infinite is it, in its fears, its anxieties, its evasions, its self-deception. And there may therefore be some little points treasured up still within the precincts of your bosom, which I have not lit upon, and which you still hug with delight, as untouched by the observations which have been made. But I beseech you cast them forth. Upon ignorance, or upon presumed knowledge above the word of God and the church of which you profess to be a member, rely not; but give up your opinions, and away with your excuses before that piercing sword of the Spirit, which shall, by your prayers, if ignorant, impart to you knowledge; if wise above the word of God, impart to you humility. But if you will hear, not an uncharitable, but an

awful truth; out of all the excuses, the objections, and the reasons, by which men keep aloof from the altar of the Eucharist, the only *true* objection that can be found, the only real and vital reason which can avail in any man's breast, as a monitor, to say, "You are not fit to approach the Lord's table," is this, a *determination not to abandon sinful habits*. But what is that? What a heart must that be? What a soul must there be presented before the living God, his conscience just sufficiently awakened to say, "You are not fit to approach," but yet not sufficiently strong to say, "Make yourself fit, through the help of the Spirit, by abandoning your sins." If the young will live in fornication and adultery, and wilfully live in it, of course they dare not approach. If the middle aged live in unjust pursuits of gain, and wilfully determine to live in them, of course they dare not approach. If your life be a life of the world, drunkenness and revelling, chambering and wantonness, and you intend to make no change in your character, then you have a valid objection: and not only should you not approach, but it would be the duty of God's minister to reject you, if you should¹. If you bear

¹ The rubric at the head of the communion service directs the curate as follows:—

"And if any of those be an open and notorious evil liver, or have done any wrong to his neighbours by word or deed, so that the congregation be thereby offended; the curate, having knowledge thereof, shall call him and advertize him, that in any wise he presume not to come to the Lord's table, until he hath openly declared himself to have truly repented and amended his former naughty life, that the congregation may thereby be satisfied, which before were offended; and that he hath recompensed the parties, to whom he hath done wrong; or at least declare himself to be in full purpose so to do, as soon as he conveniently may.

"The same order shall the curate use with those betwixt whom he perceiveth malice and hatred to reign; not suffering them to be partakers of the Lord's table, until he know them to be reconciled. And if one of the parties so at variance be content to forgive from the bottom of his heart all that the other hath trespassed against him, and to make amends for that he himself hath offended; and the other party will not be persuaded to a godly unity, but remain still in his frowardness and malice, the minister in that case ought to admit the penitent person to the holy communion, and not him that is obstinate.

ill will to your brother, or look upon any one with meditated purpose of revenge; if envy, malice, or any uncharitableness should harbour in your thoughts, then again your duty would be to turn away from those holy precincts, where nought but love can enter, to be reconciled to your brother, if he have aught against you, or you against him, and then come and offer your gift.

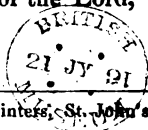
But you will surely pause before you offer any of these objections. You would not make them *openly*—you *dare* not make them openly; but pause before you make them even to yourself. While you openly, and before the public, and before the God of your salvation are exclaiming, “I have no time,” or “I am not prepared,” or “I am not sufficiently acquainted with the mysteries of the ceremony,” or “I am not fit,” or “I will postpone it till a better opportunity;” whichever it be of these, all or any, beware lest the real one which gnaws at the very vitals of your heart, the real and the secret one, be whispering to your own conscience, “I am a deliberate sinner; I am going on the broad way of the world; I am at enmity with God, and that is the reason that I will not go.”

But, my Christian brother in the Lord, suffer me to plead with you; suffer me again to recal you from the wandering of your thoughts, to bring you back with the Spirit of God to the true object of your life, to the noble business which stands before you ready to be done, to the high privileges which by this wilfulness you are in the act of forfeiting: God's grace is wide-spreading; God's mercy is great. As far as the east is from the west, so far may he set away your sins. But there is a limit. There *must* be a limit: and that limit, ye that wilfully remain in sin, *may one day pass*. I do not say that you have passed it as yet, or that you will pass it, if you should neglect even to the end of your life, this, and all the other ordinances of the church; but this I say, that this limit you *may one day pass*. It remains with God. Are you con-

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tent to leave it with God? Are you content to hope that his mercy will be unlimited to you, if your obedience and your love has so very closely-marked a limit towards him? I trow not. If you object to this memorial, inasmuch as you feel that you should incur condemnation in your presumption to join in it, *because you live in sin*, be assured of this also, whether you be rich or learned, or poor or ignorant—be assured of this also, that by living in sin with such a hardened and obstinate heart, you incur tenfold more condemnation. You are in a dilemma, out of which you can in no way escape. You present yourselves daily before God with a seared heart. You refuse the means of grace offered to you. You go on from sin to sin unadmonished, because you despise admonition; unstrengthened by any help, because you desire no help; unjustified from any source, whether from works, because they will condemn you, or of faith, because you practically believe not any of the admonitions of the Saviour Jesus Christ. Therefore you go on from sin to sin, each day more intimate with Satan, each day more alienate from God. You must go on in this course, for you cannot stand still; you must go on, until at length you will find yourself, at the great and terrible day of the Lord, in that outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

May God avert this doom from us. May we be as rational, yet humble Christians; sinners, yet not hardened sinners; frail, yet repenting; ignorant, yet faithful; aware of our danger, yet rejoicing in hope; feeling our temptations, yet knowing our help: and so fighting the good fight of faith, may we, above all, ever from time to time, present ourselves, our souls and bodies, at the table of the Lord, “a living sacrifice unto God.”



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